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Maia Lea Ray

REFLECTIONS OF THE PAST
THE CLASSICAL SPIRIT IN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

MAIA LEA RAY

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DR. PATRICIA TRUTTY-COOHILL
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Most of the great monuments of the world are products of wealth, power and purpose. In one way or another the buildings were symbols reflecting power of the monarch, of the state, of the gods or God or of the church. When buildings rose to the level of great art there was inevitably more than power involved. There was belief, agreement and even love. The Athenians prized both civic character and civic beauty. This spirit is exhibited in the Parthenon. It was set on the strongest hill and was approached by a winding and unspectacular path which later the Romans converted into a monumental way (Burchard 31). Many years ago our family traveled this winding road to reach the Acropolis. As we walked the steps of where the ancients once trod, we stood in awe, looking at the remnants of temples and statues. One does not forget the majesty of the columns left standing, stark against a clear blue sky nor cease to wonder with sadness at the destruction of mankind. The impression lingers still and is the impetus for this essay with a central focus on the Temple of Athena.

The Greek ideal of the fifth century as philosopher and historian have accounted was an age of rationalization of gods, concepts and behavior. The echo of intellectual and political activity is found in the visual arts--arts that are today defined as classical. Classicism in a narrow sense attempted to perceive patterns and set standards (Boardman 83-84). Mere imitation of standards in style and form, however, deny the spirit of the architecture. It is, rather the "ideal" which has been emulated by architects and builders over the millenniums in both public and private structure in the quest to capture the essence of the classical spirit.

THE GREEK EXAMPLE

Can this essence of the Classical be recaptured and embodied elsewhere and for another culture? Much has been written about the Athenian temple, the people for whom it was built and the exemplification of the Classical spirit in the Parthenon:

> Built on a terrain of barren, earthquake-riven mountains of marble, facing a blue and ubiquitous sea, it was made for a climate of alternating tempest, steady winds, capricious flood and snow and a short summer. It was an architecture to stand on brown hills, to go with anemones and olives, aloes and conifers. It was an architecture for a people who came near to hibernating in the winter but filled the spring and summer and fall to the brim with outdoor life and much talk. It stood against a sky which was almost always filled with clouds but seldom, save in rainy season, leaden or overcast, a vibrant, bracing clear sky sending down a light that was always mobile and sharp like the Greek temper. It was a temple to suit the spirit of restless traders and seafarers who were seldom serene and never quite predictable (Fig. 1; Burchard 30-1).

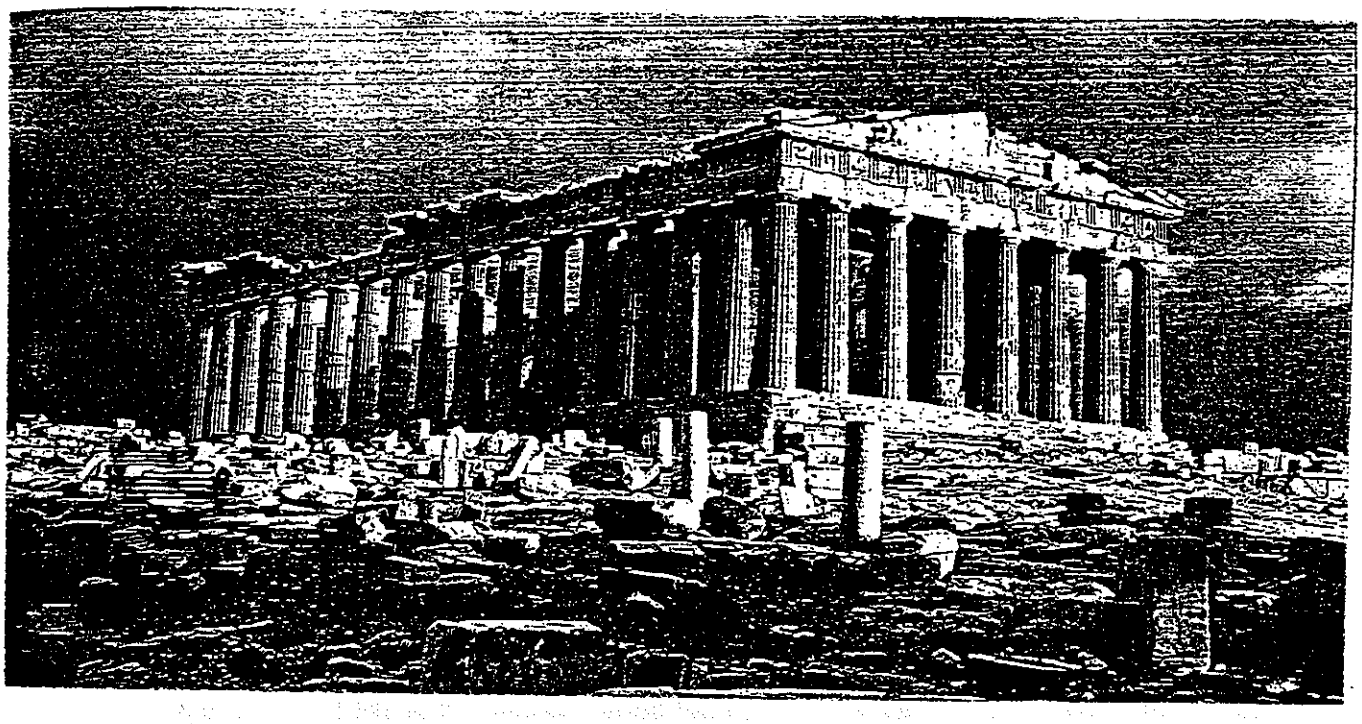


Fig. 1. Iktinos and Kallikrates, the Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens. 448-432 B.C. (De La Croix 155).

What was the purpose of this building that has been so emulated? Its purpose was to provide a great central hall or *naos* for the votive statue of the goddess Athena, another room for her treasure and an exterior which would provide a suitable backdrop for ceremonies before the outdoor altar. What was its power? Certainly, it was not just utilitarian function. As Burchard says:

> The Parthenon is not very large Its base is just over a hundred feet wide and just under two hundred and thirty feet long. It had only two rooms. Its colonnade is not the greatest nor the most elaborate of the classic peristyles. It struggles with anachronistic triglyphs over the columns, vestiges of the ends of wooden beams no longer used. Nor was it full of innovations, either . . .

Its power lies in its ability to capture the essence of the "ideal" in form, time and place. Burchard continues:

> All it had done was to use much earlier innovations and reduce them to a moment of perfection--perfection of proportion, subtlety of entasis on the columns and curvature of the bases, elegance of flutings on the columns, brilliancy of carving of the metopes between the triglyphs, . . . equal brilliance in solving the difficult sculptural problem of the cramped triangular pediment, great accommodation to the color, the light and the sky (Burchard 31-2).

Vincent Scully has shown the truth of Burchard's last statement when he shows how the Parthenon relates to the sacred nature of the landscape in *The Earth, The Temple, and The Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*:

> Greek architecture deals with the issues of "form" and "site" of the self and of reverence for that which is outside the self, of acting alone but at the same time being at home in the world . . . it balances the man-made and the natural, nature and the human will. Indeed, Greek temples and their sanctuaries express concepts which embrace the whole of the larger issues of life as the western world has most realistically come to know them, since they were the result of an attempt to grasp reality whole, not to transcend but to understand the apparent truth of things (7).

INSPIRATION FOR THE AMERICAN IDEAL

It is a romantic ideal - this notion of the classical to which the young American democracy of the early 1800's could relate. The sentiments varied toward the new mode--some were practical, others were ideological, symbolic or political. As a fledgling bird mimics its parents and is finally able to fly on its own, so too was America in her youth as she struggled to become an entity of its own. By nature she is composite of many parent countries and would reflect their characteristics in her varied facets as if trying them on for size. In her architecture she grew from the crude, pioneer cabin to the sophisticated steel, glass and fabricated structures of contemporary time as the need, technology and aspiration dictated. Nineteenth century American architecture, essentially progressive in terms of structural method and plan, repeatedly cloaked itself in earlier styles (Mendelowitz 129).

However, there was little building in America for more than a decade after the Revolution. Following an era of British rule and Colonial Georgian mimicry, America in its rebellious spirit sought for means in which to express this spirit. When large scale building recommenced it took the form of the classic revival. The new mode revealed itself in a shift toward greater formality and a new reverence for Roman and Greek precedent. In the early years of the classic revival American architecture was oriented toward Rome, rather than Greece. The more Roman oriented phase occurred in America between 1785 and 1810. The Federal government and its institutions became established during these years, giving the architecture of this period the term "Federalist" style. After 1810 ancient Greece became the focal point of intellectual and artistic inspiration in a phase known as the Greek Revival (Mendelowitz 129).

Instrumental in the stimulation of the classical in both Europe and in turn America were the archaeological discoveries of Pompeii and Herculaneum and later published studies and theories. Scottish architect Robert Adam published a study and drawings of the palace of Dioicletian in Spalato in 1764. Subsequently he and his brother used the Roman architectural detail in their extremely influential designs in England. In mid-century Johann Winkleman formulated his theories describing the development of Greek art and created his idealization of classic antiquity in which rational discipline and sensuous love were combined. Furthering Greek concern was James Stuart and Nicholas Revett's publication of *Antiquities of Athens* in 1762 (Mendelowitz 130). Published in several volumes, *Antiquities of Athens* became the architectural bible for nineteenth-century American disciples of the Greek Revival. These magnificent folios illustrated the principal ancient monuments that became icons of the Grecian style: the fifth century Ionic Temple on the Ilissus, the 4th-century Corinthian Monument of Lysicrates and the 1st-century Tower of the Winds (Lane 106-7).

The excavations of ancient sites, coincided with political unrest, an increasingly powerful bourgeois class, an extravagant aristocracy and an autocratic church in many countries and particularly France. The political events reinforced the reawakened interest in the republican institutions of Greece and Rome, as well as in the rational philosophies of classical times. By association, first the columnar Roman style of Pompeii, and later the Greek became official styles of republicanism and of the nineteenth century republics (Mendelowitz 130).

Lewis Mumford in *Sticks and Stones* considers the use of classicism in architecture a "classical myth." He writes that America reproduced in miniature the changes that were taking place in Europe and that due to its isolation and the absence of an established social order, it

showed these changes without the blur and confusion that attended them abroad. "It is difficult'" he says to tell; "whether the classical modes of building were a result of changes in society or . . . an incentive to them; whether the classical frame fitted the needs of the time, or whether men's activities expanded to occupy the idolum that had seized their imagination" (53-4). He contends that it was not through technical interests in design that classical taste in architecture developed, "for the severely classical shell arose only in regions where the social conditions had laid a foundation for the classical myth" (Ibid. 54).

For America the symbolism of the Classical Revival corresponded to the needs of the dominant classes of the period and was consistent with their general outlook on the world. James Marston Fitch, in *American Building: The Forces That Shaped It,* wrote of the dominant classes following the War of Independence -- the new capitalists and manufacturers, the small-propertied people, the independent farmers -- who were united upon a program of national reconstruction and expansion. He expands further:

> The aspirations of this society were rational, expansive, optimistic, breathing confidence in Man, his native goodness and nobility, his natural rights. The desire for a truly national culture based upon such concepts was a quite explicit factor of the period. In attempting to express these concepts, to concretize them into esthetic standards, it was inevitable that the nation impress them upon its building. In the context of the period, it was inevitable that the architectural language of the standards be that of the Roman Republic (67).

EARLY CLASSICAL IN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

As state governments and a Federal government were brought into being and administrative agencies, bureaus and commissions were formed, a pressing need developed for buildings to house them. The triumphant, energetic nation wanted its government to serve also as monuments to the pride, vigor and independent status of the new democracy and to embody its

ideals of freedom in concrete form. The classicism is evident in the American Federal style of this period. The practice was to duplicate major architectural forms, structural devices and decorative details directly from Roman buildings or from French and English classic revival designs. The professional architects also appeared during this time in America and employed domes, vaults, arches, porticoes, columns, pediments and other elements of Roman building practice from the formulations of Palladio (Mendelowitz 130).

The contribution to American architecture made by Thomas Jefferson, and agreed to by Washington in the plans for the New Federal capital was epoch making. The French engineer, Pierre Charles L'Enfant, had made a beginning in his vast scale plan for Washington D.C. with its magnificent formal framework for classical buildings. But in all probability the new Federal structures which were eventually built would have been much less purely classic if Jefferson had not been so consistently interested and eager in giving advice, counsel and inspiration (Hamlin 17). A self-made architect, Jefferson's approach was both scholarly and dogmatic. He foresaw that America would double its habitations within twenty years and would need capitols, banks and city halls. It further would require an architecture of national proportions. His ideals were reflected in his philosophy: "Once in a thousand times, a new architectural idea might be profitably exploited, but its is a sounder practice on the whole to use models which, standing for centuries, have won the suffrage of the world" (Larkin 80).

THE GREEK SPIRIT EXEMPLIFIED IN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

Neo-Palladianism remained an influential element in classical revival practice, particularly in conservative New England. However, after the turn of the century, Greek ideals came to the forefront, first in Philadelphia, in the work of Latrobe, then in Washington and

gradually spreading through the central states into New York, New England and the South. By the third decade of the century the Greek Revival was at its height. Its influence spread to the newly developing areas west of the Allegheny mountains and it flourished in the prosperous lower Mississippi Valley. In the most derivative manifestations of the Greek Revival, the Greek temple provided the pattern for architectural propriety, particularly the Doric or Ionic temple with a pedimented portico. The Greek spirit often showed in varied indigenous interpretations. Simple, functional plans, a straight forward use of materials, integrity to structure and bits of elegant classic detail, all monumentally composed. By 1840 the classic impulse had passed its climax, but the thrust toward an original, clean idiom distinguished by simplicity and structural integrity had left its imprint on American architecture (Mendelowitz 131).

Clay Lancaster, in *Antebellum Architecture of Kentucky,* gives a excellent description of the Greek revival in America during this period with some comparison to the Federal style:

> Although Greek Revival architecture continued to use some Roman forms and a sprinkling of Egyptian elements, primarily it employed . . . Greek orders and Greek motifs. The mode adhered to the trabeated system, to the rectangular void in walls, although, upon occasion . . . it resorted to round-headed openings and vaulted domed interiors in public buildings. Otherwise, arched doorways and fan and Palladian windows became obsolete, along with the delicate carving that gave them grace and lightness. The Greek Revival was massive and heavy. It was masculine, as the Federal was feminine. The Greek Revival building acquired monumentality. The classical order portico came into its own on residences and public buildings alike. The entrance doorway often was recessed and glorified by columns of correct proportions, appropriate pilasters, and heavy entablatures. Windows became larger, often lowered to the floor or widened into three lights. . . . The architectural theme of the outer building infused itself through the interior. The objectives were bigness, spaciousness, graciousness, security, and consistency (182).

EARLY GREEK REVIVAL ARCHITECTS

The Bank of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, built in 1798, is considered the first truly Greek Revival building in America. It was designed by the English born architect, Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1766-1820), who had come to Virginia as an engineer in 1796. Latrobe's Bank of Pennsylvania with its Greek Ionic porticoes and graceful low dome, its open and monumental plan, its combination of classic dignity and originality was a completely new thing. It was the work of a professional architect trained as a designer, not a builder. The bank showed the true aim of the Greek Revival movement. Talbot Hamlin in *Greek Revival Architecture in America* stresses Latrobe's originality of plan: "It was in no sense a copy of an ancient building nor did it aim at archaeological correctness, except in detail. Its plan was developed simply and functionally from the necessities of the building, with a new kind of simplicity and openness" (65). Latrobe realized that banks were modern institutions and regretted the directors' insistence that the structure imitate a temple. Although his porticoes at both ends of the bank were carried by Ionic columns of the Erechtheion, his interior combined use with beauty. There was a great circular banking hall with a vestibule in front and counting rooms behind it; a square attic and a lanterned dome above for lighting, bold vaulted masonry in its construction and offices which were fireproof. Its qualities were summed up by a noted French critic of the day, "Si beau, et si simple" (Fig. 2; Larkin 92-3).

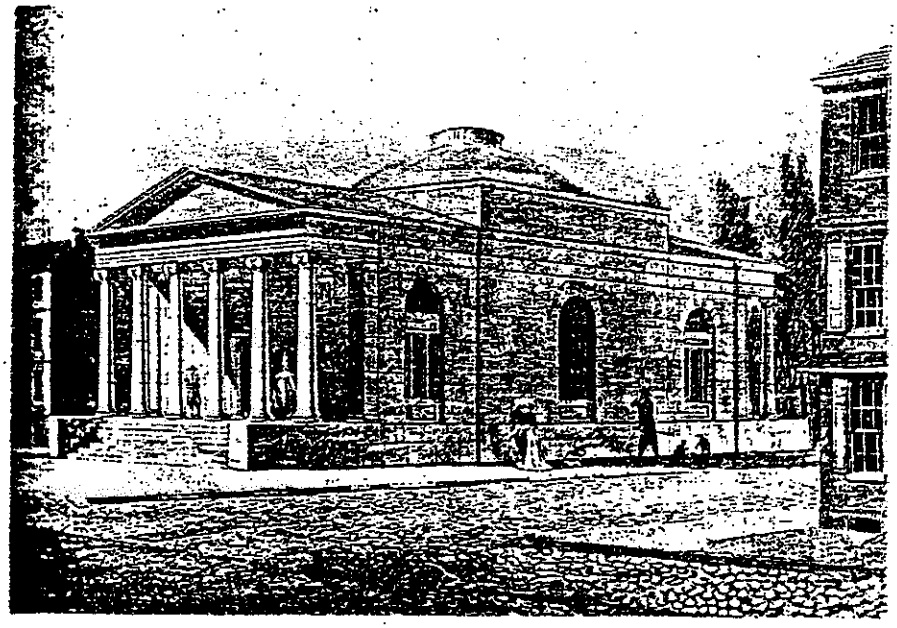


Fig. 2. B. H. Latrobe, Bank of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1798. (Hamlin Plate XVII).

Latrobe's ability was noticed by Jefferson, who by then (1810) was President of the Republic, and created for him the post of Surveyor of Public Buildings. In this position Latrobe designed and rebuilt the House and Senate Chambers and aided in coordinating the design of the Nation's capitol. His sketch for a western approach to the national Capitol showed that Greek simplicity was in his consciousness for his drawing freely adapted the Athenian Propylaea with its descent by several levels and its plain Doric portico. Latrobe revealed his philosophy in a speech to the Society of Artists in Philadelphia the reason for his Attic preference:

> Greece demonstrated that art and democracy are compatible, for the Greece of Pericles was free, and only from the time of Alexander lost that freedom and with it her perfection in the arts. The monuments of the Roman Empire were coarse in taste, the Arch of Constantine a "crowded patchwork of parts." Why ignore the earlier simplicity to copy in America the corrupt style of Diocletian's palaces? A country where talents do not depend on the favor of the great is a soil as congenial to their growth as Sparta, Thebes, or Delphi. Once the new nation learns that the home of the fine arts is in the bosom of a republic, then "indeed the days of Greece may be revived in the woods of America, and Philadelphia become the Athens of the western world" (Larkin 93).

Latrobe also established the first professional office of an architect in the United States. His pupils Robert Mills and William Strickland were his apprentices for four to five years, learned his mastery of essentials and carried on his tradition. Their work reveals another of the important elements in the American Classic Revival -- its structural inventiveness and integrity. In their work the Greek Revival movement reached its maturity, based upon soundness of construction and excellence in execution (Hamlin 46).

Using Latrobe's concept, William Strickland (1787-1854) finalized and executed the design of the Second Bank of the United States, 1824. This building perhaps more than any other established the Greek portico as a symbol of financial stability for banking institutions. It was considered one of the most distinguished structures of the nineteenth century . James Fennimore Cooper said, "that of a hundred similar magnificent structures erected in Europe, not one could be found in which simplicity, exquisite proportion, and materials unite to produce so fine a whole" (Fig. 3; Mendelowitz 143).

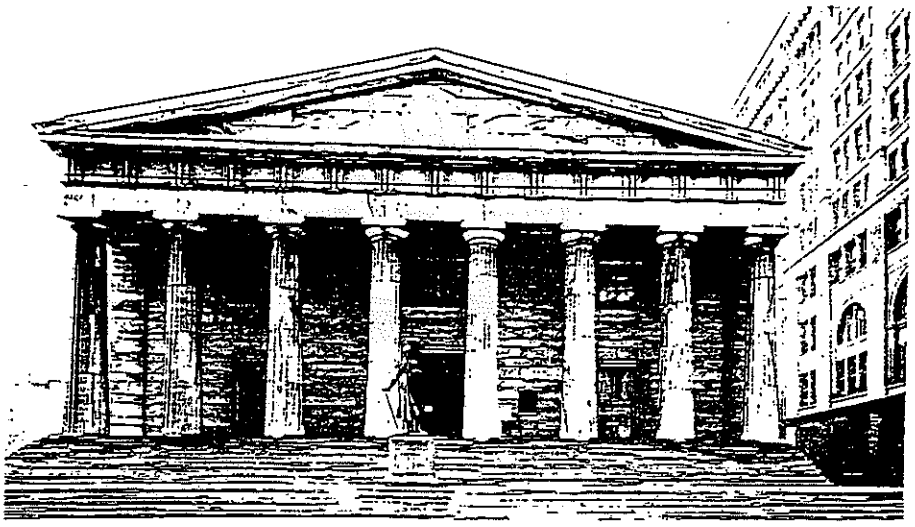


Fig. 3. William Strickland. Second Bank of the United States, Philadelphia. 1824. (Mendelowitz 142).

The average person saw only the beauty of the Greek colonnade and the lovely proportions of the pediment: the connoisseur admired it for its reproduction of Greek grandeur. Architecturally, however, its importance is due to much more than its superficial dress; its plan was magnificently conceived and its interiors were as efficient as they were beautiful and well proportioned. It demonstrated that Greek details could be domesticated in America and that modern problems could be efficiently answered in buildings based on Greek inspiration (Fig. 4; Hamlin 77-8).

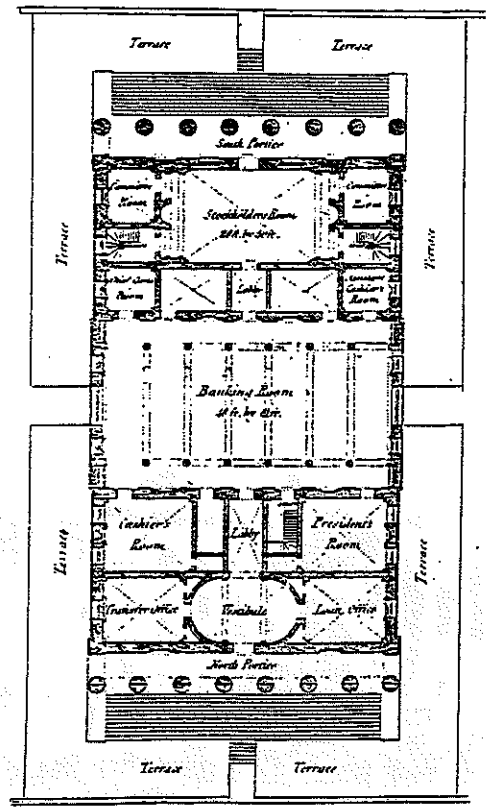


Fig. 4. William Strickland. Plan - Second Bank of the United States, Philadelphia. 1824. (Hamlin 77).

Robert Mills (1781-1855) is most remembered for the disciplined, dignified, and severe buildings he designed for the Federal government, including the imposing Treasury Department Building. The main entrance is marked by a broad stairway and a columned and pedimented portico. The basement story was kept subordinate to the main body of the building, which was fused into a single visual unit by the use of regularly spaced pilasters extending, like the portico, the full height of the building. An entablature and a simple, weighty continuous balustrade crowned the structure. Light gray granite was the preferred material of the day and was used in construction. This and other similar buildings by Mills established the prototype for government administrative structures all across the country. They reveal him as an original designer who could reconcile complex requirements of modern buildings with the architectonic integrity and dignity rather then archeological exactitude (Fig. 5; Mendelowitz 144).

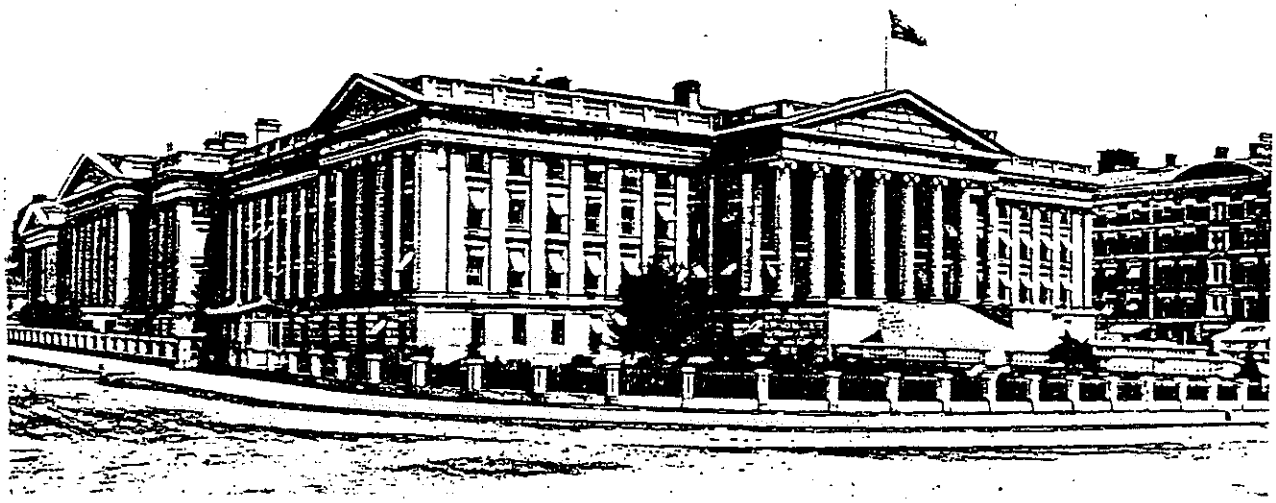


Fig. 5. Robert Mills. Treasury Department Building, Washington, D.C. 1838-69. (Mendelowitz 144).

DISPERSION OF THE GREEK STYLE

While Washington and Philadelphia were leading centers of the Greek Revival, Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee and other new states played the role of provincial outposts for the style. Latrobe worked in New Orleans; Strickland in Nashville and Mills in his native city of Charleston (Mendelowitz 144). These men were professional architects with other architects following them, however, the quick, universal spread of the Greek style must be attributed to the thousands of often nameless carpenter-builders, who worked from the writings of this period. They derived their building forms and detailed instructions from price books and rules of work. The correct Greek orders could have been derived from John Haviland's *The Builder's Assistant* (1818-1821 or Asher Benjamin's *Practical House Carpenter* which reached fourteen editions between 1830 and 1857. Also much in use were Minard Lafever's *Beauties of Modern Architecture* having five issues before 1855 and Edward Shaw's *Civil Architecture* which had eleven printings from 1830 to 1876 (Larkin 156, 57).

Whether using architects, designers or carpenter-builders the classical mode flourished from Philadelphia, Washington, the Hudson River Valley, Boston and Baltimore. The Greek Revival was the idiom of the most progressive forces in American life. The chief proponents of the Greek were the men and women who were most active in the great movements of the period. They were bringing new libraries, art galleries and museums and orchestras to America. It was they who were interested in the plight of the workingman, the poor, the sick, the orphans and the insane which all needed proper structures to house them. West of the mountains a new empire was also building, settled by New Englanders who brought educational and cultural forms with them. A great number of towns were given Greek place names during this period —Athens,

Sparta and Troy. Throughout the territories, schools, city halls, churches, banks and houses were mushrooming in Ohio, Indiana and into Kentucky and Tennessee all with in the Greek tradition (Fitch 80-84).

Soon there was scarcely a community of average size from the Maine village to the Michigan settlement from Georgia to Louisiana which did not possess temples, complete or approximated. Many houses of this period were Grecian by afterthought. One could achieve the Attic flavor by adding a two-story portico to the plain, flat-roofed home of one's forebears; Nicholas Biddle, Pennsylvania banker, commissioned the architect Thomas U. Walter to dignify his country home Andalusa in this fashion and Andrew Jackson's Hermitage in Tennessee acquired its portico many years after its original construction (Fig. 6, 7; Larkin 162).

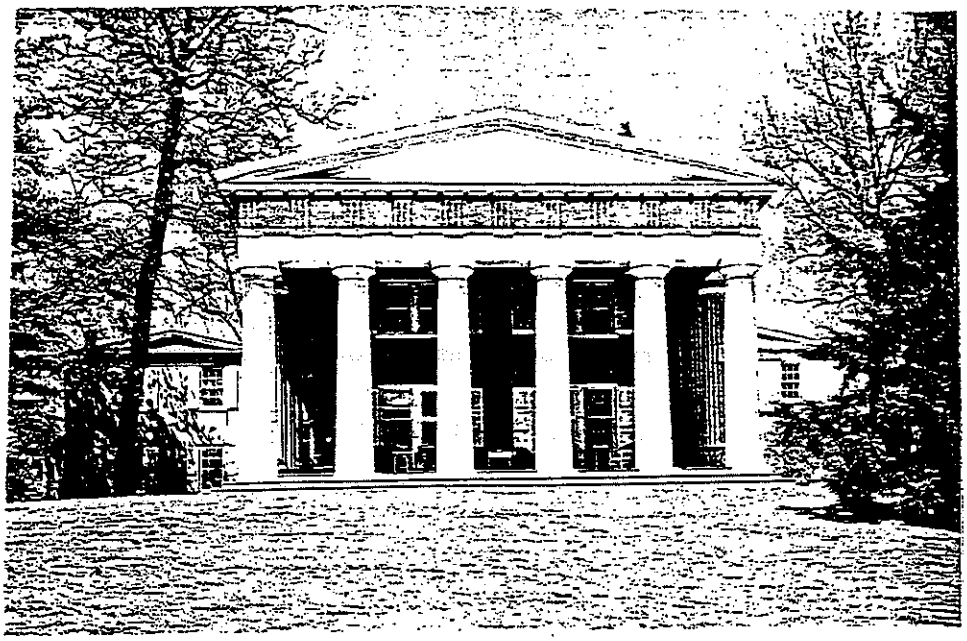


Fig. 6. Andalusa, home of Nicholas Biddle, Andalusa, Pennsylvania. 1833. Greek facade, Thomas U. Walter (Mendelowitz 142).

Fig. 7. The Hermitage, home of Andrew Jackson, near Nashville, Tennessee, 1835. Architect unknown (Fitch 83).

The landed gentry of the South continued to live in a grand manner and built accordingly. With the extension of the southern agricultural world through the purchase of the Louisiana Territory and the acquisition of Florida, the plantation system expanded and the great cotton and sugar empires of the far South developed. Slaves skilled in the building crafts enabled southern landowners to build with an unprecedented splendor. The facades of great mansions that lined the shores of the Mississippi varied tremendously but often included great Greek porticos and pediments. Two examples of these plantation mansions may be seen for their varied design, Belle Grove and Oak Alley both in Louisiana. Belle Grove with its great colonnaded portico was rambling and irregular with seventy-five rooms depicting the owners whim and exuberance,

while Oak Alley demonstrated more of the Greek Revival taste of impressive simplicity and regularity, with a two story gallery around the house and great two-story columns supporting the roof (Fig. 8, 9; Mendelowitz 145, 46).

Fig. 8. Belle Grove, near White Castle, Louisiana. 1857. (Mendelowitz 146).

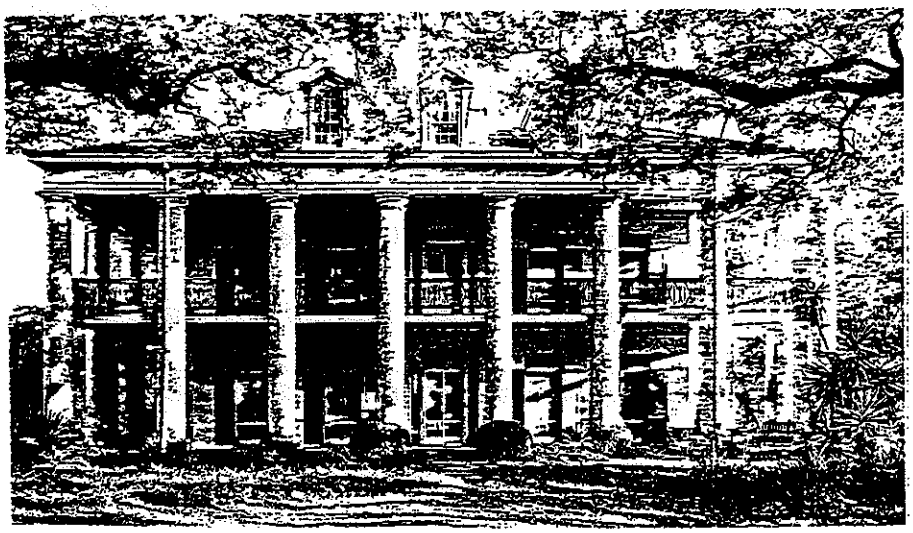


Fig. 9. Oak Alley, near La Vacherie, Louisiana. 1836. (Mendelowitz 146).

So the movement toward an American architecture spread, east and west, north and south; the palatial steamers that plied up and down the great river system bound together Pittsburgh and New Orleans, unifying the culture along the river banks, bringing together Cincinnati and Louisville, St. Louis, Memphis, Vicksburg, and Natchez. Despite conflicts in political sentiment, despite differences of national and linguistic background, despite even the growing and ominous sectional controversy over slavery, there was being built up some basic unity of feeling that found its architectural expression in certain basic harmony of forms (Hamlin 257).

THE GREEK SPIRIT IN KENTUCKY ARCHITECTURE

Characteristic of the Greek Revival as it developed in the 1820's of the more western states was a search for bigness, for simplicity and for restraint accented by richness. The responsibility for implanting the Greek mode in Kentucky rests with a young native, Gideon Shryock (1802-80). His father, Mathias Shryock, was a prosperous builder-architect who had moved to Lexington from Maryland. Mathias made extensive use of the Benjamin and Lafever handbooks decided that his son Gideon must receive the very best Greek Revival training possible before he entered the building business. Gideon was sent to Philadelphia to study for a year with Strickland, and from this year of study he brought back an enthusiasm for Greek detail and a creative proficiency in using it that made him one of the most skillful of all earlier Greek Revival architects of the country. His first big work was the state capitol at Frankfort (Hamlin 244).

After serving as an apprentice to his father and the study of architecture with William Strickland, Shryock established his practice in Lexington. He received his first important

commission in 1825 after the second statehouse at Frankfort burned. This structure is extraordinary in many ways. Here in Frankfort -- what was then the Far West -- a building was erected which in its delicate Greek Ionic order, as in its basic monumentality of planning, was almost a decade ahead of its time even when judged by eastern standards (Hamlin 244). The two story building is of prostyle form, the columns silhouetted against a plain wall with a single entrance such as is proper to Greek temples (Fig. 10). According to his own testimony, Shryock's inspiration for the Kentucky capitol was the temple of Athena Polias at Priene in Ionia, a building celebrated for its chaste lines and beauty of proportion.

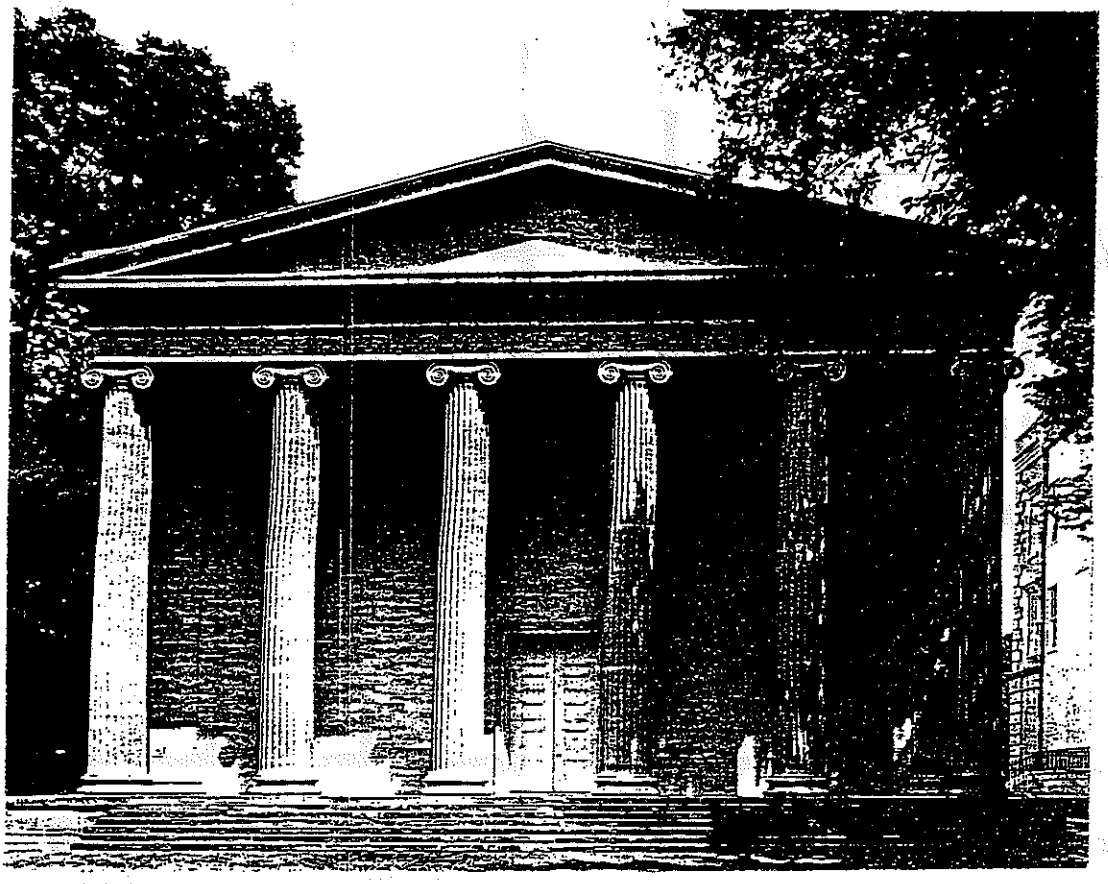


Fig. 10. Gideon Shryock. The Kentucky State House. Frankfort. 1827-30. (Lane 110).

The Kentucky State House is a two-story hexastyle temple constructed of cream-colored Kentucky marble. The lower floor was designed to house the Court of Appeals, a library and various committee rooms; the second floor to contain the House of Representatives and the Senate, with their cloakrooms. A feature of the structure is a central circular staircase crowned by a dome and lighted by an oculus which is reflected by a circular, dome-crowned lantern on the roof. The foyer leads directly to this stairway. The plan is simplicity itself, and the arrangement becomes immediately obvious on entering the building (Fig. 11; Newcomb 111).

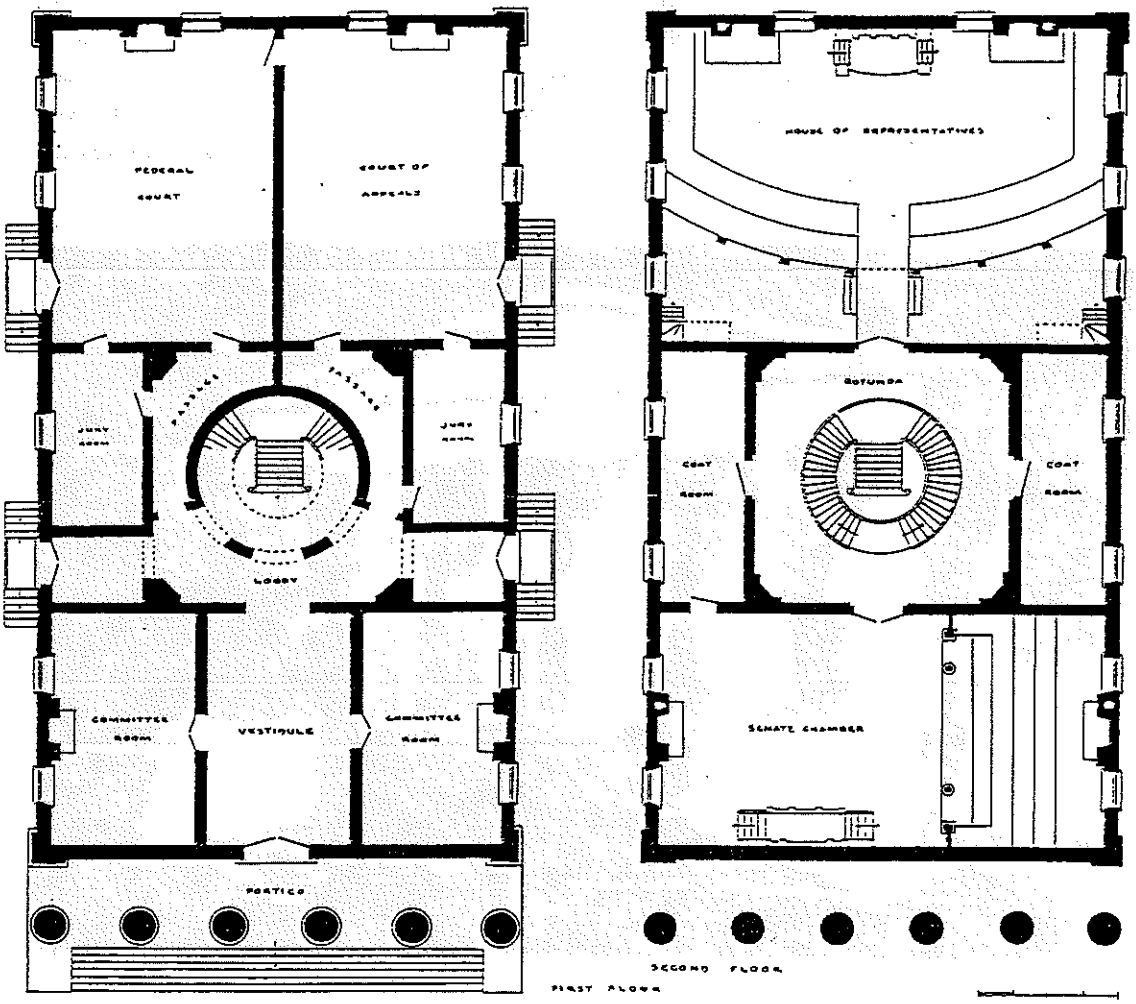


Fig. 11. Gideon Shryock. Plan. Kentucky State House. Frankfort. 1827-30. (Lancaster 192).

Shryock's second important work in Kentucky was also the result of a fire loss. Morrison College of Transylvania University in Lexington was begun in 1830 and completed in 1834. It is described in Clay Lancaster's *Antebellum Architecture of Kentucky*:

> The Morrison College building, planted on the summit of a low hill commanding a fine vista of Lexington, has a basement, a ground floor, an elevated first floor, and a second floor. The center pavilion is 68 feet across and features a pedimented hexastyle Doric portico with a broad flight of stone steps in front of the three middle bays, and great cubic antepodia on either side (Fig. 12). . . . The channeled columns are of brick, stuccoed over like the walls. The frieze of the wooden entablature is enriched with triglyphs. The main block extends back 115 feet, including the portico and steps. It contains a wide entrance foyer on the main floor, flanked by stair halls, and it originally had a chapel at the rear with balconies across the east and west sides on a level with the second story. Balanced wings, each 32 feet across and 45 feet deep, accommodating the library and classrooms of the academic and law departments, are capped by parapets masking the roof. It was a bold composition and set a precedent for simplicity in the Greek Revival movement that it inaugurated in the Bluegrass (Fig. 13; Lancaster 195).

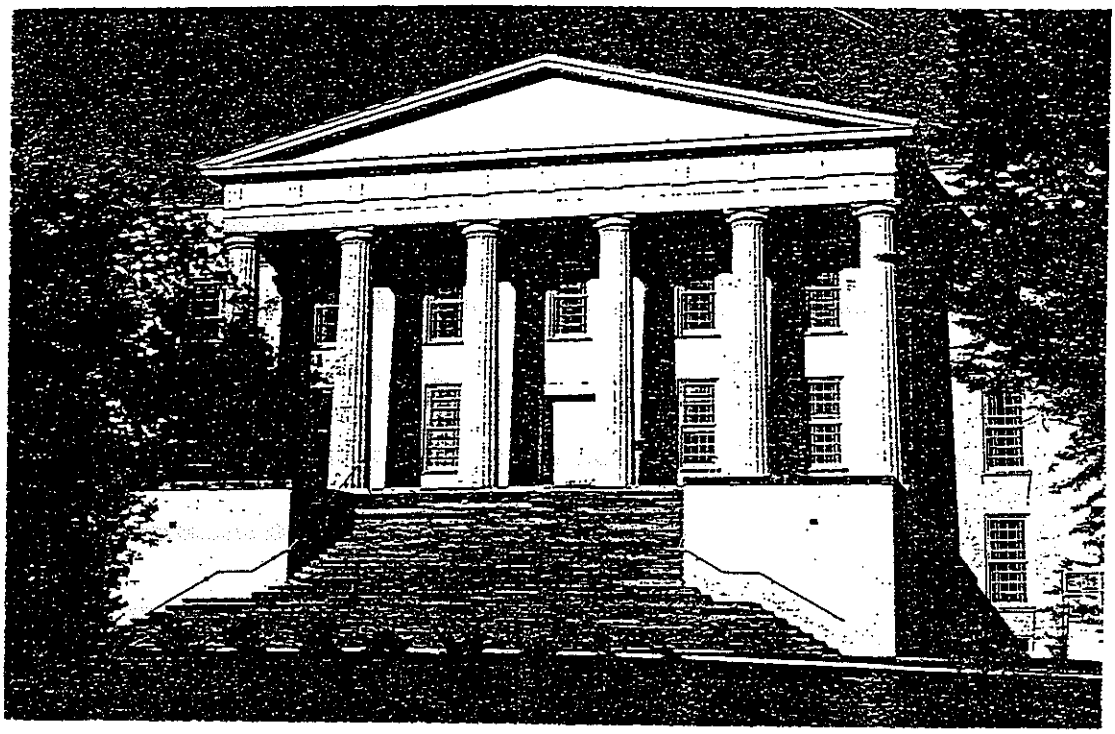


Fig. 12. Gideon Shryock. Morrison College, Transylvania University. Lexington. 1830-34. (Lancaster 194).

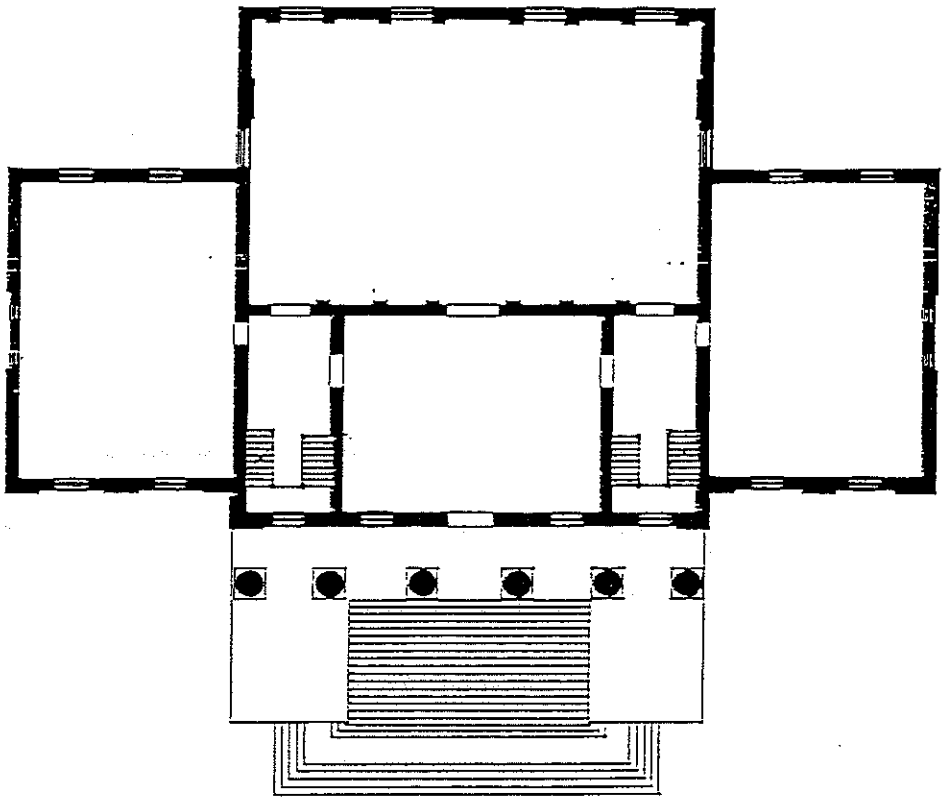


Fig. 13. Gideon Shryock. Plan, Morrison College, Transylvania University. Lexington. 1830-34. (Newcomb 115).

Shryock's building on the Transylvania campus today is better known as "Old Morrison." Most students hold an affection for this building which burned several times and was rebuilt. It housed the wounded during the Civil War. Seniors get their group portrait taken on the steps and couples wed in the newly built chapel. This building holds special significance for me as I finished my undergraduate degree in art. I worked for the Dean of Students in the left wing of the edifice. It gives one a sense of dignity and importance as you mount the broad stairs and enter behind the tall pillars. My painting class painted the building in dappled sunlight, framed by brilliant autumn foliage. It was my first architectural structure to seriously draw and paint and left me with a love of detail in architectural observation and rendering.

Gideon Shryock's work achieved almost instantaneous fame. The impetus it gave to the use of Greek forms was irresistible and more and more in houses as in public buildings Greek details began to creep in. While the style had its greatest triumphs in its public buildings, the Greek house design came in more obviously, in the more usual ways, by the addition of Greek porticoes to older houses or as the style became better understood, by the design of new kinds of houses in which the choice of Greek detail was the controlling element. The architects and builders seem to have been as avid in their use of the eastern Greek Revival handbooks as an earlier generation had been in its use of the Benjamin books (Hamlin 245-46).

The Kentucky house which most completely reflects indebtedness to a specific builder's guide design is that of planter Robert Dillard in Hopkinsville. It was built in the mid-1850's from the prototype in Minard Lafever's *The Modern Practice of Staircase and Hand-rail Construction.* Lafever has perfectly balanced columned galleries encircling the curved end of lower wings right and left of a pilastered rectangular mass. It is labeled "a design for a country residence which presents elegance and conveniences suitable for a gentleman of respectable circumstances." (Fig. 14). Fretwork panels appear beneath windows and between the chimneys of the main block of the house. Colonnades at the sides make use of the Corinthian order. The first-floor plan consists of a stair hall and twin parlors separated by sliding doors, a "breakfast parlour" in the annex adjacent to the hall, pantries between this room and the rear of the hall and a bedroom and conservatory opposite (Fig. 15). The second story contains five chambers (Lancaster 221-22).

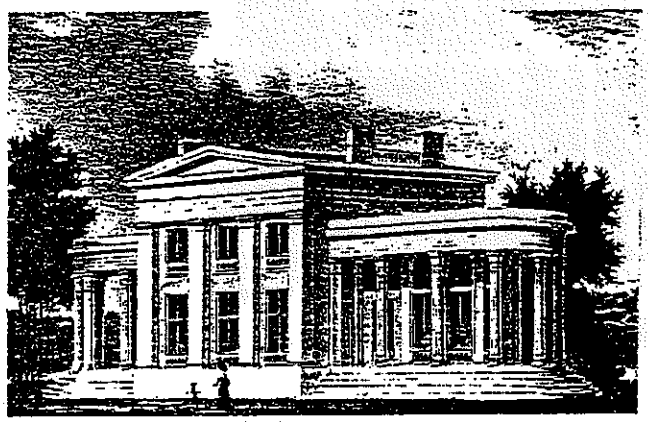


Fig. 14. "Perspective View of a Design for a Country Residence." Minard Lafever, 1838. (Lancaster 222)

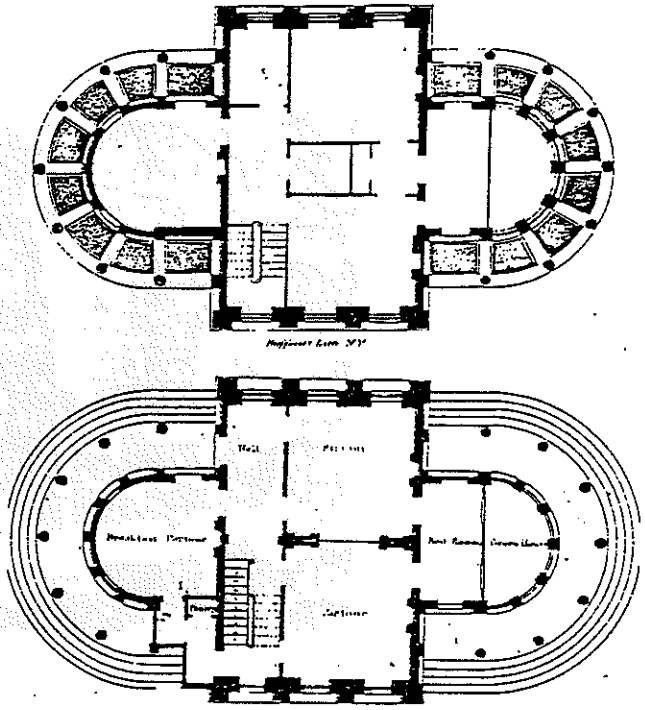


Fig. 15. Floor plans of design from Minard Lafever, 1838. (Lancaster 222).

The *Dillard House* in Hopkinsville is simpler than the Lafever design. It sits close to the ground. The colonnades are Doric and the architrave and frieze are differentiated only by a fillet (Fig. 16). Parapets above the wing cornices mask the roof, which slopes downward toward a valley in the center. The walls are wood, and the surfaces between pilasters are given a rusticated treatment. Windows in the wings appear only in the flat surfaces front and back. The house reverses the hall-parlour arrangement, the dining room could be reached only from the porch, and the opposite wing contains a single chamber (Fig. 17). Two large bedrooms and a small hall room occupy the second floor. Lafever had suggested that this house "May be built with all necessary conveniences, on the rear of the plan"; and his advice was taken in the Dillard House, where a pantry and kitchen of two stories opened off a dogtrot (Lancaster 221-22).

Fig. 16. The Robert Dillard House. (ca.1847), Hopkinsville, Kentucky. (Gibbs 154).

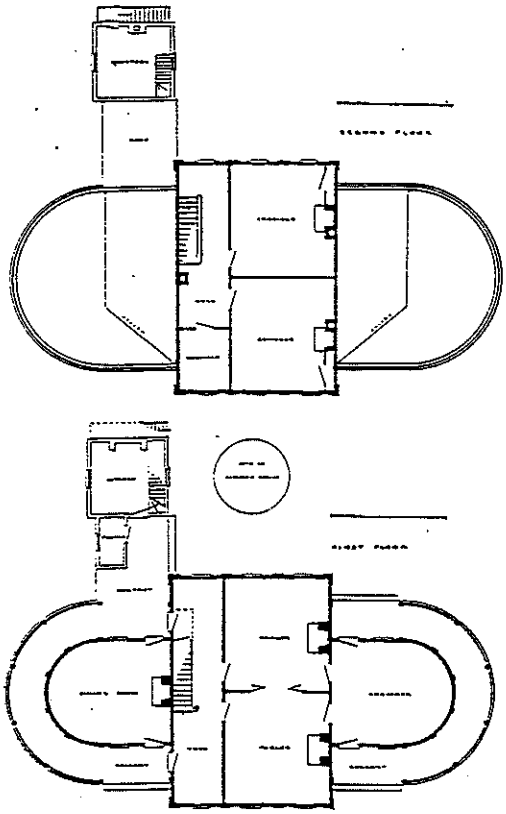


Fig. 17. Restored floor plans. The Robert Dillard House, Hopkinsville, Kentucky. (Lancaster 223).

I visited this house as a teenager when it was an elegant antique showroom, and more recently attended art exhibits and architectural lectures there. Additionally, I have rendered it in pen and ink (Fig. 18). It has been restored and is currently used as a banking institution.

Fig. 18. Maia Lea Ray, Robert Dillard House, Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Pen and Ink, 1995.

DISSOLUTION OF THE GREEK REVIVAL

"Thus in Kentucky as elsewhere, the Greek Revival appears as the great unifying American style of its time," writes Hamlin.

> It liberated the designer from the trammels of traditions that were dying or dead; it stood for the unity of construction and design in its successes in courthouse and in college building, as in the state house itself, it became the authentic voice of the new country west of the Alleghenies as it was the expression of the best thought of the older regions farther east" (249).

The culture and conditions in which the Greek Revival flowered and of which it was the perfect expression also held the seeds for its dissolution. Hamlin expresses it profoundly:

> A culture learned, founded on classic myth, classic literature, classic art. A culture perhaps more completely aesthetic than any American culture since. A culture flowering lustily in hundreds of local centers and not yet centralized in the big cities. A culture radical, libertarian, experimental, eagerly searching for American expression. A country rich, expanding, not yet densely populated; a country with its agriculture and its growing industry still in fundamental balance. A country with growing towns and cities, new-blossoming farms; a country pressing ever westward and demanding an amazing amount of building of every kind . . . (329).

Why did the Greek Revival pass away? With such a background of unity, with such a strong cultural foundation, with such an apparent fitness for the America of its time, what killed it? What made the change between the architectural ideals of the forties and those of the seventies? Primarily the reasons lay in two categories -- the cultural and the economic. During those decades of growing sectionalism and of the Civil War, American culture and American wealth were both undergoing profound changes, of which architecture was but one expression (Hamlin 330-31). This was a period of expanding intellectual and social horizons, this age witnessed dynamic economic growth. The industrial revolution and the rising democracies were creating a multitude of new institutions and economic activities. Architects were challenged to devise special forms for myriad of previously nonexistent types of buildings --factories, railway stations, and department stores. There was a zealous search for styles that would express the humanitarian ideals and deep sentiments that guided the period. As the designer was looking to the past for inspiration, technological change was revolutionizing the techniques and materials of building. American architects and builders readily adapted structural iron, plate glass, the iron nail and other innovations (Mendelowitz 147). For Fitch, there were many reasons for the demise of the classical:

> As the idiom of an aristocratic, pre-industrial way of life which was often rural and explicitly anti-urban, it was proving both functionally inadequate and ideologically unsuitable for the *nouveau riches* of industrialism. Their mills and factories, warehouses and commercial buildings were raising all sorts of new demands --greater strength, clear span and height, greater ratio of window to solid wall, which traditional structure could not meet. In addition, with the spread of education and travel, this same new class was being exposed to a whole new range of esthetic experience. Urban wealth offered them a spectrum of possibilities which would have been inconceivable fifty years before. Against this, the cool and balanced discipline of the Classic appeared less and less adequate" (95-6).

By its arbitrary limitation of expression the classical eventually set up a current of opposition. The artistic expression based on classical ideals focused on the rational, the controlled and the balanced. It relied on the deep springs of human emotion -- mystical, inspirational, subconscious rather than conscious. The often irrational had been held in check by the classicists were gathering force in the nineteenth century. The movement that gave expression through all the arts to the deepest feelings of the nineteenth century has been termed "Romanticism." Romanticism embodied those artistic tendencies which are opposed to classicism-- the dominance of emotion over reason, reliance on personal taste and intuition rather than on tradition, an emphasis on content rather than on form and reference to the literary and historical associations rather than a concern with purely formal and esthetic elements (Mendelowitz 148).

Talbot Hamlin expresses Romanticism this way, "In the Gothic Revival itself, which had in a narrower field almost exactly paralleled the Greek Revival, there was an innate character which, developed, spelled the doom of the Greek: that was its feeling--or rather its lack of feeling--for structure. To a much greater extent than with the Classic Revivals, the Medieval Revival had roots that were literary. Gothic romances led to 'castellated' houses; in both it was

the 'atmosphere,' the emotional effect, which was the essential thing. Naturally the way the effect was produced was secondary . . ." (332). Hamlin, the advocate of the Greek Revival, had to concede that in certain cases it was guilty of eclecticism in treatment of surface for decorative effect. For example: the Greek Revivalist stuccoed brick to imitate stone, normally used in ancient monumental buildings. The Gothic Revivalists however, did not imitate the spirit of the Gothic structure which had as its premise the visual demonstration of technology of its vaults. The structural dynamics of the masonry vaults are merely imitated for decorative and associative effects in lathe and plaster. Denying truth of materials destroyed a sense of architectural integrity. The loss was the death of the essential spirit of the Greek Revival (Hamlin 333-34).

With the American cultural climate changing, the rapid expansion of industry and transportation, travel, education, the vast influx of European immigrants and finally the Civil War, as Hamlin said, "the last sparks of the Greek Revival tradition flickered and finally died; the world of Reconstruction days was a different world" (337).

INDIVIDUALISM

Following the Civil War and throughout the seventies, eighties and nineties there was a dispersion of styles unconnected with the classic and romantic programs. Fiske Kimball writes of these decades in *American Architecture*.

> Soon there was created among designers the conscious principle of complete freedom of choice between the various historical styles. A given style was adopted on grounds of personal preference or supposed suitability to the problem. . . . The American individualism which demanded a house different from that of one's neighbor was unrestrained by the taste of a settled aristocracy, the tenacity of peasants or the impotence of a herded proletariat (119).

This period of American architecture has been called the "dark ages" and has often painted blacker than they really were. For there was no time when good work was not being done. The last of the old leaders and traditions survived to overlap with the new, with each of the passing movements producing certain works which had merit and value. What was unique was the relative submergence of these leaders and these works in the mass of vulgarity (Kimball 119-22).

SEARCH FOR HARMONY

Through the parade of styles were the Victorian Gothic, the Romanesque, the Chateaux, Queen Anne, Colonial American and then a return to the Classic. There was a renewed interest in unity and purity of form. Its elements --masses and spaces of geometrical simplicity --offered an established language widely understood. Leading the way was the firm of McKim and White. The significance of their work lay less in the derivative forms but rather in the harmonious order and serenity of spirit. To "characteristic emphasis and lavish dynamic energy they opposed an almost mathematical simplicity, a Dorian harmony" (Kimball 162-63). It can scarcely be doubted that the underlying influence was sought in the heritage of classic monuments from the formative period of the nation which McKim and his associates had been the first to appreciate. The founders of the republic, after a half-century of confusion, once more imposed their artistic ideal (Ibid 163).

The issue of whether function should determine form from within or whether an ideal form might be imposed from with out was much debated by the architects and designers during this time period. For many the formal ideal of form came to the fore following the World's Fair of 1893 in Chicago. Its central group of structures became the *Court of Honor* in which its

designers agreed to give a uniform cornice, a uniform brilliant whiteness and a general congruity of style, the classic. Buildings suggestive of the Roman baths, with vast columns rising from ground to cornice or the great peristyle of the Palace of the Fine Arts mirrored in the lagoon were of unforgettable dignity and grandeur (Fig. 19). The throng of visitors, many of whom were seeing large buildings for the first time, was deeply stirred by the ordered magnificence and harmony of the of the *Court of Honor*. The unified effort and effect, associated with the its classic use of forms in which it was achieved made a lasting impression on the whole nation (Kimball 167-68).

Fig. 19. *Court of Honor,* Chicago World's Fair, Chicago. 1893. (Larkin 312).

MEMORY OF THE CLASSICAL LINGERS

The effect of the Chicago Fair was electric. American architecture turned to the formal, the classical, and the monumental. It was attacked as being arbitrary and even as false by those who favored the theory of function. The public, however, was quick to respond to the basic appeal of groups of unified and dominated masses, to the musical compositions of interior space. The American designers made what had been thought a dead language the idiom of current speech, expressing with unexpected flexibility the ideas of a new age. The formal, the classical and the monumental was seen in the rhythmic facade of the Boston Public Library, the vast vaulting of Pennsylvania Station and the Triumphal Arch to Admiral Dewey.

A perfect realization of the classic ideal--the triumph of form with the landscape was reached in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. McKim had designed an oblong temple-like peristyle, placed across the line of the vista on the main axis. Henry Bacon, one of McKim's artistic heirs with a Greek sensitiveness and refinement, was entrusted with the work. Using L'Enfant's plan, a long canal bordered with straight avenues was led from the obelisk to the foot of vast circular terraces which uphold the pedestal. A wall within the surrounding columns was raised above in a simple attic, carved with emblems of all the states. Inside, facing the Capitol is the great brooding figure of Lincoln. His noble words are engraved on the walls in pillared recesses. There is nothing more, except the supreme distinction and peace of the architectural forms themselves, handled with love and refinement by an artist of quiet and choice spirit. There is no effort, other than in the sculpture, specifically to characterize the individual. The uncouthness of the rustic vanishes in the nobility of the man, his greatness in the life of the nation is marked by, the dominance of the site, and the grandeur of scale (Fig. 20; Kimball 181).

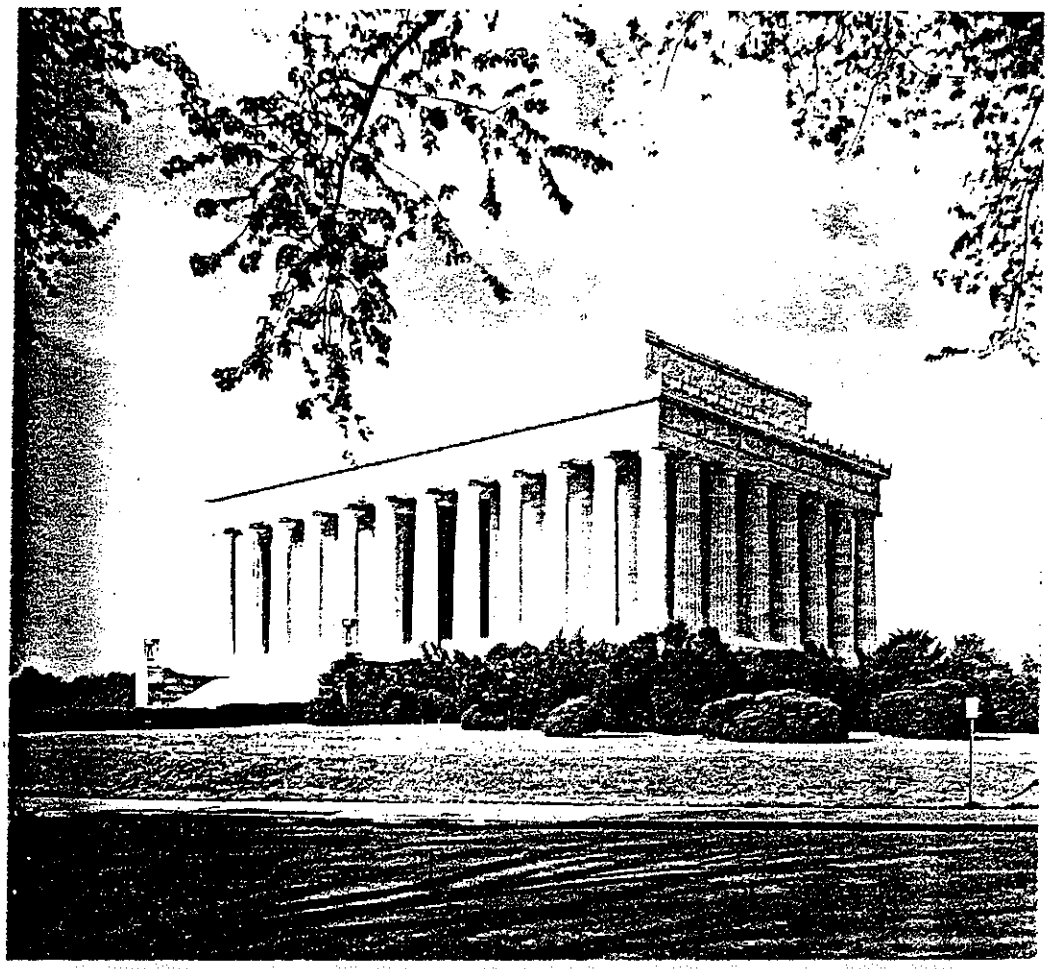


Fig. 20. Henry Bacon. The Lincoln Memorial. 1922. Washington, D.C. (Burchard 340).

AN ARCHITECTURE OF INSPIRATION

The formal, the classical and the monumental may also be seen in the work of early twentieth century Kentucky architect, Brinton B. Davis (1862-1952). In 1909 Davis was commissioned to design a master plan for Western Kentucky State Teachers College, (the present Western Kentucky University). Born in 1862 in Natchez, Mississippi, Davis was the son of a self-taught architect. After attending school in Boston, he held several internships before setting up practice in Paducah, Kentucky in 1892. With an established reputation, he moved to Louisville in 1902 where he remained until his death fifty years later. The Master Plan for

Western included nine major buildings, a swimming pool and stadium. Henry Wright, a noted landscape architect from St. Louis along with Davis developed the plan for the hill. Wright is described as having "an almost sensuous feeling for land and contour." They worked closely to develop President Cherry's vision (Harrison 36). Davis's plan called for an unusual circular arrangement of structures around the prominent hill of the campus which allowed each building to dominate its spatial section of the hill's perimeter while leaving a large green in the center (Fig. 21; KY Heritage Council 2). The plan for Western may be compared to that of the Athenian Acropolis as the structures rest in a larger landscape than just the campus. They relate to the community, the city and the state (Fig. 22).

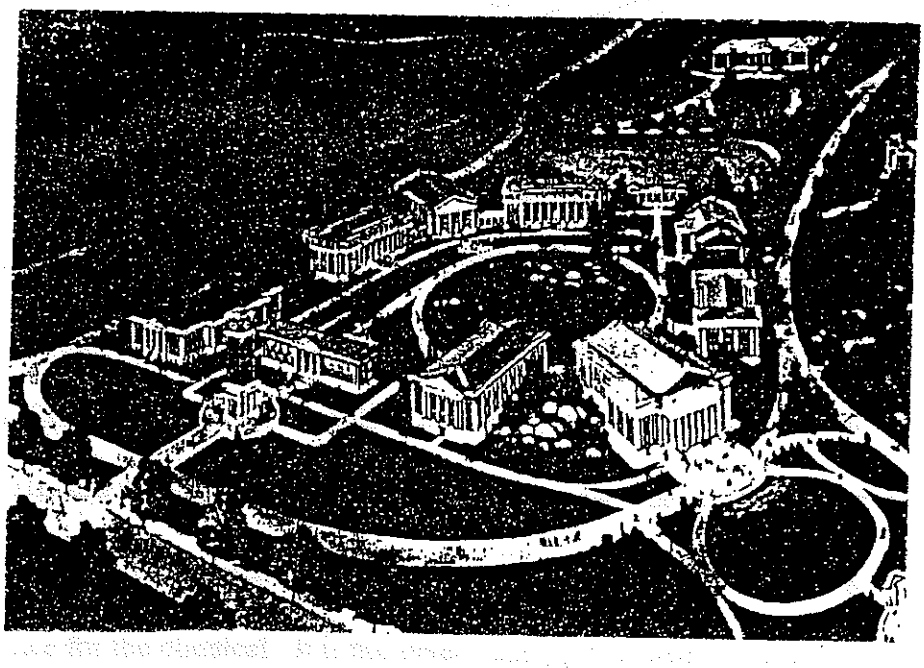


Fig. 21. Brinton B. Davis. *Master Plan for Western Kentucky Teachers College*. 1910. Bowling Green, Kentucky (Jeffrey 9).

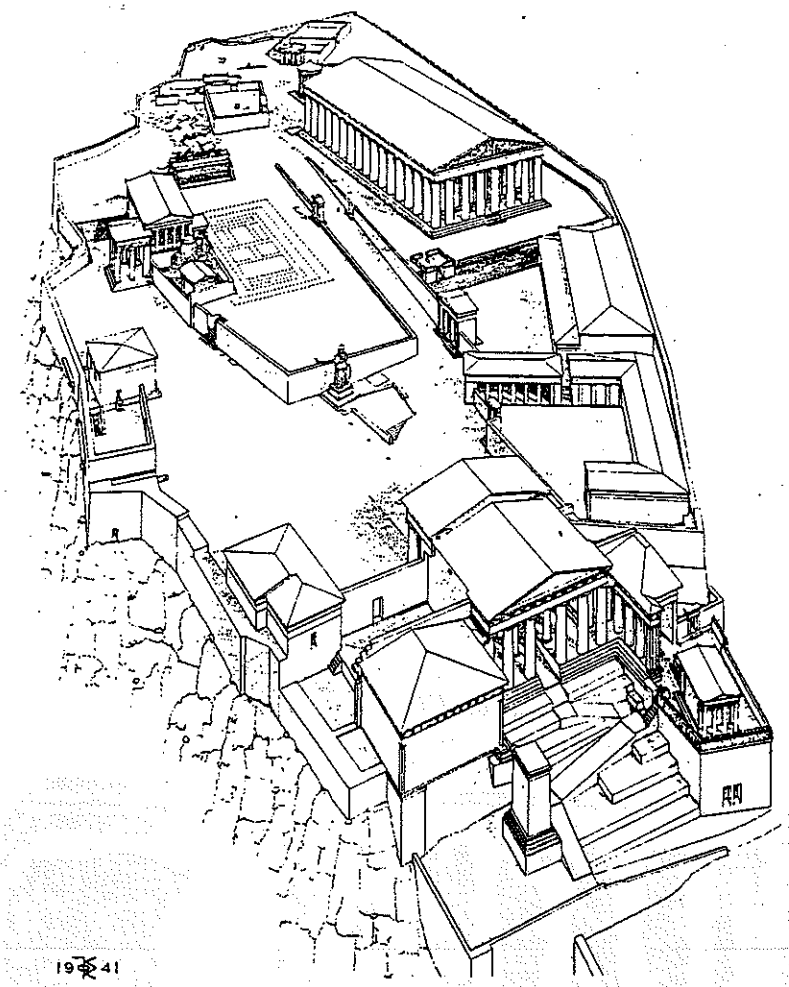


Fig. 22. Acropolis, Athens. Reconstruction drawing (Scully Fig. 321).

Davis's first building to design for the Western campus was the Administration Building and the last was Cherry Hall. Each of the structures, Cherry Hall, the President's Home (Craig Alumni Center), Florence Schneider (West Hall), Gordon Wilson (Library Building), Helm Library (Health Building), The Kentucky Building, the Manual Arts Building, Perry Snell Hall, the original Stadium and Van Meter Auditorium (Administration Building) demonstrate Davis's reverence for the classical. It is the latter building that will be our focus. Western's President, Henry Hardin Cherry wanted the building to reflect the institution's promising future. The Administration Building was to incorporate administrative offices, three classrooms and an auditorium for chapel services. Davis chose a Classic revival style that hinted at the Erechtheion

temple on the Acropolis with its stately portico, classic ornamentation and location on top of the hill. The structure's classical prototype reflected the growing trend to substitute the asymmetrical massing and gaudy ornamentation of Victorian Eclectic architecture for classicism's symmetrical formalism and restrained ornamentation (Fig 23). Davis, a proponent of this shift, considered "Athens the birthplace of good architecture and all that is great, good and judicious in architecture" (Jeffrey 10).

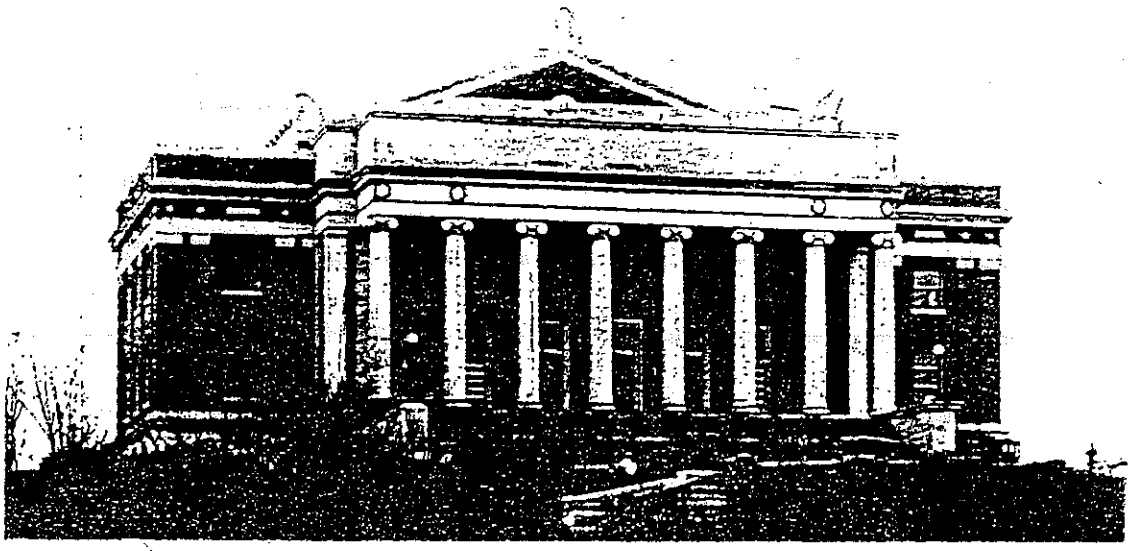


Fig. 23. Brinton B. Davis. Van Meter Auditorium. 1910. Bowling Green, Kentucky. (University Archives, Kentucky Building).

Davis's basic philosophy of architecture may be seen in an address given to the Kentucky Chapter of the American Institute of Architects:

> Nations have always sought to embody great undertaking in harmonious architectural form. Over the whole earth and at all periods they have raised the pillars of their temples and public buildings and reared to the skies the minarets or towers of their mosques and churches like an act of hope and faith carved in stone. All great ideas of all civilizations have their imperishable monuments which are eternal reminders of the conquests made by the human mind.

> The Colossus of Rhodes, the Acropolis at Athens with its monuments in architecture, the beauties of its Parthenon and priceless treasures in art, attest a nation whose soul was in her work, whose inspiration of perfection in beauty were drawn from lofty ideals. By these same tokens we should know her citizenship to have been of high intelligence and scholarly attainments, liberal in their thoughts and unselfish in their government (6).

Van Meter Auditorium is named in honor of Captain Charles J. Van Meter, a riverboat captain who was instrumental in the development of the Green and Barren Rivers for commerce. He was elected Chancellor of the Western State Normal School and aided in developing the Bowling Green Business University. When the state bought Potter College it was through Captain Van Meter's generosity that the stately building was made possible (*Confederate Veteran* 155). The building is of red brick with details of white limestone. Among the building's outstanding architectural features are its stately portico, graceful Ionic columns, classic ornamentation and placement at the crest of College Hill (KY Heritage Council 3).

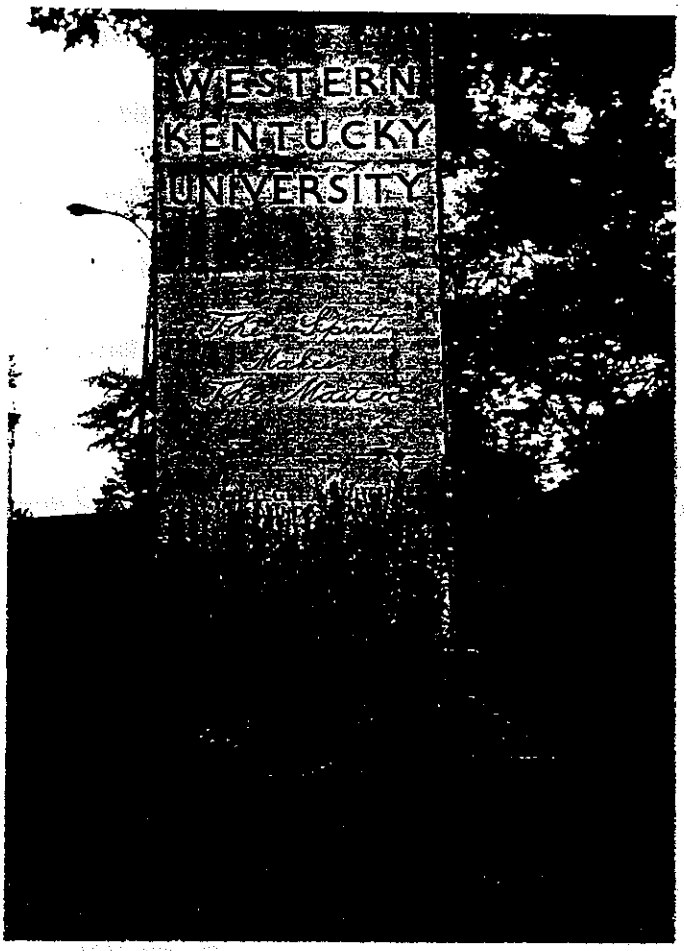
The pride manifested in the new building was apparent at its dedication in May of 1911 as thousands toured it. The student paper praised the building eloquently, citing its "gleaming white columns" and the "open doors" that beckoned students to enter and "conquer ignorance." Davis's classical design of the administration building created a bastion of knowledge to top the city's highest hill and created the aura that Cherry had envisioned for he was concerned with the biggest, the highest, the most, the best, the most worthwhile, and the most beautiful. A student visiting the campus in 1913 thought the administration building "the biggest building in the world." For students coming from farms on the Barrens or near the Knobs, this majestic structure "towered" (Jeffrey 11).

Van Meter Auditorium continues to inspire students in the present day. Lost, tired and fearful of the new after my first day on campus as a graduate student, I stumbled upon the marker, "The Spirit Makes the Master." Walking a bit further I encountered the Van Meter building and mounted the steps, leaned and rested against one of its columns. I looked out over the misty green of the Barren River Valley and to the hills of the far horizon. This was to become my point of inspiration and reverie throughout my graduate career. I have rarely been inside. It is the prominence, scale and columns that give me strength and courage to strive for higher ideals. Brinton B. Davis's philosophy concerning the role of architecture is one to which I can relate:

> First of all among the pleasures that architecture can give is that which anything beautiful brings to an understanding heart, which warms the whole being, and sends one about his work wiser and better and stronger. And last and greatest of all, the best architecture brings us inspiration, a feeling of awe-struck peace and reverence, a feeling of the immense glory and worthwhileness of things that occur only in the presence of something very great indeed" (4).

CONCLUSION

As we look back through the corridors of time to the Greek example of the ideal form in architecture it is no wonder mankind has revered its endeavor toward perfection. It has been seen that each successive architectural style has taken elements from the preceding ones. If this reflection is what is necessary for a successful journey; Let those components which lend structure, form and integrity; Let those elements which create harmony, rhythm and balance; Let those constituents which give a sense of grandeur, nobility and strength that ultimately inspire one to greater accomplishments be perpetuated in our architecture. It is after all as Cherry exhorted his students: "The spirit that makes the master."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